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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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SUBJECT: "Camphor Basil"...Information from the plant scientists of the United States Department of Agriculture.

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Hardly a lady is now alive who often needs camphor to revive. Yes...the fainting fair with her bottle of smelling salts passed on some decades back. But her passing didn't reduce the demand for camphor in this country. Several industrial uses and medicines take considerable amounts of it.

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Getting enough to supply these demands has been something of a problem since the war started. Natural camphor was out. The only commercial source of natural camphor up to now has been the camphor tree which grows in Formosa. And Formosa, of course, is in Japanese hands.

Synthetic camphor, made from turpentine, is used satisfactorily for most industrial purposes. But it isn't exactly like the natural product used mostly in medicines. Then too, our sources of turpentine can hardly be considered as unlimited.

But here's the story. A natural camphor can be extracted from the plant known as camphor basil. Camphor basil is related to our common, garden growing sweet basil...but it grows mostly in Africa. Plant scientists of the United States Department of Agriculture have found that it can be grown as an annual crop in this country.

It's an ordinary looking plant...looks much like some of the varieties of mint only more woody. White hairs along the stems and long oval leaves give it a slightly gray-green color.

The scientists say that a comparatively small acreage -- ten to twenty thousand acres -- of the plant in this country would supply our pre-war demand for natural camphor. As yet, there's no supply of seed for commercial growing of camphor basil. But it's quite possible that, before long, we may hear more about this camphor cousin to the sweet basil we already know.

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